

Reaching Out to 21st Century Students: The Value of Connecting with “Near Completers”

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Connecting with “Near Completers”

- Institutional Grants for Targeted Student Success Initiatives
- Project Mentor – ECTC
- Graduate Assistant/“Recapture Campaign” – MuSU
- A Case-Management Approach – Hopkinsville
- Overview & Questions

Institutional Grants for Targeted Student Success Initiatives

- RFP released summer of 2012
- Focus on “near completers” – students who had accumulated at least 75% of the credit hours needed for degree completion
- Short-term strategies that addressed persistence/graduation rates
- Projects that could produce immediate impact

Grantees Awarded

- Ashland CTC
- Big Sandy CTC
- Elizabethtown CTC
- Gateway CTC
- Henderson CTC
- Hopkinsville CTC
- Madisonville CTC
- Murray State University
- University of Louisville
- West Kentucky CTC
- Western Kentucky University

Near Completer Outreach



Near Completer Outreach Elizabethtown CTC

Our initiative involved contacting students enrolled from fall 2010 through summer 2012 who had completed 75 percent of credit hours toward an associate degree.

- Ran query and identified 740 near completers.
- Scheduled information session to be held November 15. Recruited speakers, master advisors, and student services personnel to participate.
- Mailed letters of invitation to the information session to cohort group of 740 near completers.
- Thirty faculty, staff, and administrators telephoned 25 near completers each to personally invite them to attend the November 15 information session. A prescribed script was provided, and valuable information was collected.

Near Completer Outreach Elizabethtown CTC

- Phone Script
- Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening,
- I am YOUR NAME with Elizabethtown Community and Technical College. Recently you received a letter indicating that you have fewer than 15 credit hours remaining to complete your associate degree.
- I am calling to personally invite you to attend a special information session on Thursday, November 15 at 6 p.m. in Room 212 of the Regional Postsecondary Education Center. First, you will need to complete an application for admission for spring semester prior to the November 15 meeting, which you can do from the ECTC website. Advisors will be present to help you to schedule your courses, apply for financial aid, and learn about online course opportunities.
- If you plan to attend, please call Sheila Fonda at 270-706-8788 by November 12 to register. We look forward to hearing from you and hope that you will consider returning to ECTC to complete your degree.

| Phone Number | Student's Name | Spoke with Student | Left a Message | No Answer or Message | Notes: Student interested in attending Nov 15 Session Interested under some conditions Needs additional information Not interested in returning to college |
|--------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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Near Completer Outreach

Elizabethtown CTC

- Information session held with short presentations held on “Why Complete an Associate Degree” including wage, unemployment and career advancement statistics, “Applying for Financial Aid,” and “Online Course Opportunities.”
- Students who had already completed admissions applications (as instructed in the letter) went to a computer lab, where they were scheduled for spring semester by 12 master advisors.
- Others who had not completed admissions applications were directed to a second computer lab, where they were assisted by student services personnel.

Near Completer Outreach Elizabethtown CTC

- Twenty six (26) students attended and completed schedules for spring semester.
- Reminder postcards were mailed to the cohort group.
“Time to apply for spring semester. Registration is in progress. Please contact the ECTC Admissions Office at 270-706-8801 for additional information.”
- Our grant received newspaper coverage in the Elizabethtown News Enterprise on November 26 drawing yet more publicity for the need to return to college and complete degrees. The paper also ran an editorial on the initiative on December 6.

THE NEWS-ENTERPRISE

WEDNESDAY

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ECTC urges retention, completion

Program targets students who have finished 75 percent or more of requirements

By KELLY CANTRALL
The News-Enterprise

The local community college is taking part in a statewide effort to draw students who have left school back into the halls of Kentucky postsecondary institutions.

Elizabethtown Community and Technical College officials have started a program to assist former students in re-enrolling and finishing up a degree or diploma. The college started the program with a mini-grant of \$5,000 it received from the Council on Postsecondary Education. The college matched the grant with its own money.

The council awarded nearly \$50,000 in mini-grants to Kentucky colleges and universities to identify and assist students who have completed 75 percent or more of the requirements for a degree or diploma.

Turn to ECTC, A7

ECTC: 'It has just generated all kinds of interest'

Continued from A1

Melissa Bell, council director for student success, policy and initiatives, said many efforts to boost student retention, or keeping students enrolled in school, are focused on those in their first or second year. This program was a way to focus on a population of students who are farther along in their respective degree programs. Retention is a key issue for the council.

"Degree completion is very important to us," Bell said.

Sue French, ECTC dean of instructional and professional development, said she was interested in the grant because of how it could affect the lives of qualifying students. A person with an associate's degree can earn, on average, \$7,000 more a year than someone with a high school diploma, French said. Post-secondary education is needed for the majority of jobs now, she said.

ECTC officials identi-

fied 740 students from the past three years who fit the criteria of the grant, she said. They mailed information to these students and followed up with phone calls.

French said many of those who received a call expressed interest in returning to ECTC and were happy to hear from someone at the college.

ECTC officials hosted a meeting Nov. 15 to allow the former students an opportunity to re-enroll and meet with an adviser and financial aid staff.

The meeting led to the college re-enrolling 26 students, but French said she expects the number to continue to grow.

"It has just generated all kinds of interest," she said.

Many of the students contacted discussed starting back in the fall, so French and others will follow up with them in the spring or summer.

French said many former students need some encouragement to consider going back to school. She was pleased the program has begun to impact residents because "that credential opens all kinds of career options for them."

The work of the col-

leges helps the institutions and the Council on Postsecondary Education to meet its degree completion goals, but there are more beneficiaries of the programs.

"Ultimately, it helps the individual students," Bell

said.

Those interested in more information on the program can call ECTC Admissions at (270) 706-8801.

Kelly Cantrall can be reached at (270) 505-1747 or kcantrall@thenewsenterprise.com.

EDITORIAL

Bringing students back to college

ISSUE: Targeting former students for degree completion

OUR VIEW: Program could bring many benefits

More students are earning degrees at Kentucky colleges, but it's not enough.

College readiness is part of the equation, yet postsecondary education can't wait to do better with the next crop of high school graduates. Students who have left the classroom can't be universally written off, left dangling in a harsh job market, dragging down the perception of instructional performance and, likely, missing their life goals.

Too many students leave Kentucky's colleges and universities by some way other than the commencement stage.

Fewer than half of Kentucky college students graduate from a public university within six years, according to the most recent figures of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education. Statewide, less than a quarter of associate degree seekers graduate from a community or technical college within three years.

Education experts cite a variety of reasons students drop out of college. These causes of attrition — reviewed at the 2012 Student Success Summit for faculty, staff and administrators across the state — are rooted in everything from academic preparedness to feeling isolated, from financial issues to institutional issues that can leave students feeling disconnected.

Postsecondary leaders need to identify strategies to bring good students back. Along with preparing high school students for the challenges of college and engaging students in retention efforts, bringing students back has to be part of the mix.

A \$5,000 grant from the Council on Postsecondary Education is helping Elizabethtown Community and Technical College reach out to such students.

The college was among 11 Kentucky institutions to receive money to identify and assist stu-

dents who have completed at least 75 percent of the requirements for a diploma or degree.

It's great news that, as this program indicates, information and encouragement can bring students back. Providing information and encouragement is doable and worth improving someone's quality of life.

Still, it's not just students and colleges who benefit. A higher number of college graduates equates to a more skilled workforce. That can fuel innovation and economic growth. It also equates to a better perceived quality of the workforce, which helps local and state organizations compete for jobs.

The money enabled school representatives to contact 740 students from the past three years. In November, ECTC conducted an event for re-enrollment and meeting with advisers and financial aid staff. Similar meetings could be held later.

The November meeting led to 26 students re-enrolling and school officials expect more. Some students expressed interest in coming back to school in the fall, so ECTC representatives will follow up with them in the spring and summer.

To qualify for the grant, schools had to create a program that addressed causes of attrition. ECTC's activity addresses motivation by talking to students about the increased earning potential that comes with a com-

Along the way, officials learned something interesting about their former students, too.

At first, Sue French, ECTC dean of instructional and professional development, thought they would find students needed more help with reading, writing and math skills because of the remedial work many students already are doing. But these students — further along in their college careers with 75 percent of their requirements complete — usually left school for financial and family reasons, French said. So, advisers were sure to provide guidance on financial aid and online classes, too.

This editorial represents a consensus of The News-Enterprise editorial board

Near Completer Outreach Elizabethtown CTC

- Ran query on January 22, 2013 and found that 77 near completers of the 740 cohort group had re-enrolled. Seven additional near completers enrolled in second bi-term classes.
- June 2013 query determined that of the 84 total who re-enrolled for spring that 12 completed associate degrees.
- A second reminder postcard for fall registration was mailed to the initial group minus those who had re-enrolled.
- August 2013 query determined that 7 additional students completed their associate degrees and 2 completed diplomas during spring term 2013. Seven (7) students completed associate degrees and 1 completed a diploma during fall 2013. Eight (8) newly enrolled near-completers re-enrolled for summer 2013 and 23 newly enrolled near-completers re-enrolled for fall 2013.

Near Completer Outreach Elizabethtown CTC

- By July 2014 of the 740 near completers in the original cohort group, 129 students (17.4 percent) re-enrolled at ECTC over four terms to complete credentials. There were 111 credentials awarded which included:
 - 27 AA degrees
 - 2 AS degrees
 - 19 AAS degrees
 - 3 diplomas
 - 40 certificates

Near Completer Outreach Elizabethtown CTC

- Grant was extended a second year. The second cohort group consisted of 413 near completers from academic year fall 2012 to summer 2013.
- Forty two (42) near completers re-enrolled, and 15 credentials were awarded within the year.

Near Completer Outreach Elizabethtown CTC

Lessons Learned

- The optimum time to encourage near completers to return to college is about two years from their departure i.e. need to time to get life in order.
- Phoning had a very positive impact on near completers' return to the college and demonstrated that we truly cared about them.
- Faculty and staff enjoyed phoning students and working to ensure their return to college.
- As a result of the grant, we have established and implemented procedures to continue outreach efforts to near-completers each year.

Recapture Campaign



Recapture Campaign

- Overview
 - *Focus on Fall 2008 Cohort*
 - Specifically on who had not graduated by May 2012, were classified as Junior or Senior, **AND** were eligible to return (N=341)
 - *Goal*
 - 5% of the 341 would graduate by May 2014 (N=18)

Recapture Campaign

- Strategy
 - *Hire Graduate Assistant to contact all 341*
 - What can we learn?
 - *Communicate with colleges/schools*
 - Need to change major
 - No classes taken in 1+ year
 - Further and more specific academic advising
 - GPA and major-requirement issues
 - Unable to graduate by May 2014

Recapture Campaign

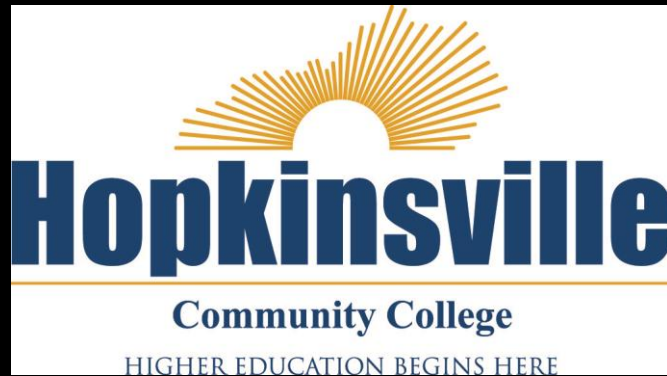
- Assumptions
 - *Contact could actually be made*
 - *Timeframe*
 - This took longer than we thought it would take
 - Outdated contact info
 - Would not respond to efforts
 - Requested an extension from CPE
 - Still had money in the budget
 - MuSU agreed to pay the balance to keep GA through Fall 2013 semester

Recapture Campaign

- Results
 - *Goal*
 - 5% of 341 would graduate by May 2014 (N=18)
 - *Actual*
 - 54% graduated by May 2014 (N=185)
 - 10 more graduated in August 2014

Recapture Campaign

- Lessons Learned
 - *Individual outreach matters*
 - Introductory e-mail and phone call follow-up
 - Students feel special and important
 - *Academic departments want our students to graduate*
 - Willing to work with students to get them moving forward



Hopkinsville Community College

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Peer2Peer Degree Completion Project

Our Challenges

- Traditional focus and staffing-levels only to:
 - serve enrolled students
 - recruit new students
- Only surface-level attempts to encourage near-completer stop-outs to return:
 - postcard mailings
 - robocalls
 - advertising

Unique Retention Challenges

- 41% of our college's enrollment can be traced back to our service to the military community on post at Fort Campbell... a very transient population
- We lack the broad array of allied health programs beyond nursing RN/PN (diagnostic medical sonography, physical therapy assistant, radiography, respiratory care, and surgical technology) offered by nearby KCTCS sister institutions. Many allied health students start with us and transfer before finishing.

The Need... A Fresh Approach to Near-Completer Stop-Outs

- A case management approach
- A more personal method
- An outreach that compliments intrusive-advising
- A more consistent, methodical, on-going effort
- A sustainable program, despite the more labor-intensive requirements

Staffing of Project

- Hired former student worker (temporary employee)
 - a near-completer stop-out who only lacked a couple of math courses and had run out of federal work study eligibility.
- College had already invested a great deal of training time in the student worker and was pleased with of work ethic and overall broad knowledge of the college (primary role had been working at the campus information/welcome desk).

Methodology

- Ran query of near-completer stop-outs who had completed 75 percent of a degree or more (45+ credit hours) covering the previous three-year enrollment window.
- Placed Excel spreadsheet on a secure server accessible to the project staff member (former student worker) and viewable by the project supervisor (Dean of Student Affairs)
- All contacts were documented in detail on the spreadsheet

Methodology

- Multiple departments were informed of the project and were made aware of the potential flurry of referrals (admissions, records, financial aid, advising center, career development, veterans services).
- Depending on “reason” for stopping-out (either personal or college-created barrier), referrals were made to student services professionals for more extensive follow-up and encouragement to return to complete their degree.

Legend

- 1 = No answer/not able to contact
- 2 = Transferred to another institution
- 3 = Cannot afford school
- 4 = Owes balance to HCC (R2T4, etc.)
- 5 = Medical issues
- 6 = Personal/family issues
- 7 = Enrolled
- 8 = Took classes in past but has no desire to return to pursue degree
- 9 = Taking a break. Plans to return in future
- 10 = SAP issues
- 11 = Turned in verification materials too late
- 12 = Work conflict
- 13 = Almost finished but could not find open classes
- 14 = Moved/moving
- 15 = Banned from campus. Disciplinary issues.
- 16 = Legal issues/incarcerated
- 17 = Already earned degree. Showed up on query in error
- 18 = Deceased
- 19 = Deployed/military training commitment
- 20 = PCS'd out of area

Methodology

- First grant year award the list was worked
 - Focus was on getting through the entire list with personal contacts via email, phone, personal letter
- Second grant year the list was re-worked
 - Follow-ups continued with students who had not yet enrolled
 - Peer2Peer support continued of those students who had enrolled as a result of the project

| | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|--------|
| 1,284 HCC Students (45+ Credit Hours Earned, No Degree) | | |
| Now enrolled and pursuing degree (by end of the grant project) | 608 | 47.40% |
| Unable to reach via repeated phone/email/snail-mail attempts | 320 | 24.90% |
| Transferred to another institution (12 to KCTCS colleges, 86 to non-KCTCS) | 98 | 7.60% |
| Moved/moving. Referred to HCC representative to discuss online classes. | 49 | 3.84% |
| SAP (Satisfactory Academic Progress) financial aid eligibility issues | 47 | 3.70% |
| Owes balance to HCC (R2T4, etc.). | 39 | 3.03% |
| Wants to return. Referred to HCC representative for follow-up. | 38 | 2.96% |
| Taking a break. Plans to return in the future | 30 | 2.34% |
| Took classes in the past but has no desire to return to pursue degree. | 26 | 2.00% |
| Work conflict | 7 | 0.55% |
| Already earned degree. Showed up on query in error. | 6 | 0.47% |
| Needed to apply for degree. Referred to HCC representative. | 5 | 0.40% |
| Math barrier | 4 | 0.31% |
| Cannot afford school. Referred to financial aid representative. | 3 | 0.23% |
| Verification Issues / Financial Aid | 2 | 0.16% |
| Medical issues | 1 | 0.08% |
| Banned from campus. Disciplinary issues. | 1 | 0.08% |

Lessons Learned

- Labor-intensive, personal follow-up, proved more effective than other less personal methods such as postcard mailings and other forms of advertising.
- Repeated, personal contacts were more well-received than anticipated
- Key is multiple, on-going contacts spread over multiple semesters. Not just one or two interactions. “Working the list” again and again and keeping detailed notes is critical

Lessons Learned

- Beneficial to approach with multiple methods: email, personal letters, phone.
- Involve multiple departments for referrals and support. Reasons for stopping out are varied.
- Opportunity to remind students who transferred to four-year institutions of reverse-transfer to earn associate degree.
- Opportunity to re-enroll students who moved out-of-state in online courses to finish.

Lessons Learned

- The vast majority of the reasons students stopped-out were personal and not related to the institution. So the critical value in influencing a return was the repeated encouragement – even if they were not ready the first couple of times outreach efforts too place.

Going Forward

- Campus efforts to sustain the Peer2Peer Degree Completion program
 - Internal budget reallocations (short-term)
 - Strategic Needs Analysis (SNA) budget priority to include the program in the job description of a full-time retention coordinator (long-term)
- Opportunity to take advantage of new *Starfish Early Alert* and *Starfish Connect* retention and intervention tools
 - Advising notes

The Value of Connecting with “Near Completers”

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